

from this site indicates some striking changes as a result of a greater influx of trade items, increased aggression from northern tribes, disease epidemics, and the possible alliance of the Sauras with other Piedmont tribes.

Several generations later William Byrd contemplated the plight of the Sauras after surveying an abandoned village.

“It must have been a great misfortune to them to be obliged to abandon so beautiful a dwelling, where the air is wholesome and the soil equal in fertility to any in the world. The river is about eighty yards wide, always confined within its lofty banks and rolling down its water, as sweet as mild and as clear as crystal. There runs a charming level of more than a mile square that will bring forth like the lands of Egypt, without being overflowed once a year. There is scarce a shrub in view to intercept your prospect but grass as high as a man on horseback. Toward the woods there is a gentle ascent till your sight is intercepted by an eminence that overlooks the whole landscape. This sweet place is bounded by a fine stream called Sauro Creek, which running out of the Dan and tending westerly, makes the whole a peninsula.”

Byrd's appraisal of the Saura's misfortune gains validity when one considers the modern-day characterization of the Dan River valley as one of the most fertile, well-drained flood plains in Piedmont North Carolina. A decade after Byrd's visit, settlers from Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania recognized the area's potential and produced their own settlements in the abandoned territory of the Sauras.

Based on assessments of both contemporary and past excavations, we can see a rich cultural heritage unfolding for the Sauras. Evidence points to a well-developed and self-sufficient civilization, which not only made efficient use of the available resources, but imparted skilled craftsmanship into their everyday endeavors.

Evidence of such craftsmanship is displayed in remnants of the pottery which the Sauras manufactured for probable use as storage, cooking, or food containers. The surfaces of many of these fragments are decorated in a variety of fashions, which include notches, punctuations, finger pinching, and incised lines that produce geometric patterns. Some types exhibit a technique known as burnishing, in which the exterior is rubbed with a hard, blunt instrument to produce a shiny surface. Other vessel fragments bear the impressions of corn cobs, carved paddles, or other objects, to produce different surface textures. Size ranges extend from small cups to large vessels measuring up to twenty inches in diameter. Vessels with cone-shaped or rounded bottoms and flaring rims are commonly encountered, but other examples display rims that are turned in. Despite this variety, a certain amount of continuity exists among pottery fragments from different time periods, providing one of the links between the Dan River and late Sauratown phases of occupation. One surface treatment, classified as Oldtown Net Impressed, represents a tradition that spanned at least 680 years.